

NCES Fellows

NOVEMBER 1998

UPDATE

Web Resources

<<http://nces.ed.gov>>

If you don't already have this website bookmarked, take the time to do so now. NCES's home page is quickly becoming one of the most popular places to visit in the Department of Education. The only two websites that attract more visitors in the Department provide student financial aid information and instructions for filling out the aid forms. NCES's website may not be giving away money, but it is giving away lots of information.

All the latest in publications is at **<<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/wnew.idc?l>>**; the most recent news is at **<<http://nces.ed.gov/ncesnews.html>>**. Among other applications that make the NCES website both current and informative are features such as the News Flash Subscription Service at **<<http://nces.ed.gov/newsflash/index.asp>>** where you can sign up to receive e-mail notification in your selected areas of interest.

And while you are at the NCES website, test your knowledge of education data by trying the NCES Daily Pop Quiz at **<<http://nces.ed.gov/popquiz>>**!

continued on page 2

News from the Field

An Interview With NCES Fellow R.I. Mutope A-Alkebu-Lan

THE NCES Fellows Program revealed such a "vast array of information" that "I was in awe," says Mutope A-Alkebu-Lan, executive director of the Skillman Information Center at the Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit. Since graduating from the Spring 1998 program, A-Alkebu-Lan has been "a drum major for NCES" not only for his center but also for many other organizations, associations, and individuals. When his center was established, its information focused on substance abuse and prevention; today the center "has information on almost everything," including education. A-Alkebu-Lan is now making sure that researchers in, for example, the medical school's addiction research institute are aware of the NCES surveys on public school evaluation, private schools, and school and staff. He has also made sure that the director of a medical school project

working with schools is aware of NCES comparison data tracking high school students. In addition, he has had the publications list copied, is passing it out, and is exploring how the publications and education statistics can be made easily available to grant and proposal writers at Wayne State.

A-Alkebu-Lan is emphasizing the availability and value of NCES library statistics and publications in his roles as president of the African American Library Association of Michigan, as former president of the Detroit Public Library Commission, and as a member of the American Library Association (ALA). At the last meeting of the ALA in Washington, DC, for example, he featured the easily accessible library surveys and the public and school library statistics during a workshop lecture. Further, in his role as a board member of a theological institute in California, he has made sure that the institute,

continued on page 3

An Interview with NCES Fellow James Gilbert

THE spring 1998 NCES Fellow Program “has expanded horizons for applications of NCES data,” says James Gilbert, special assistant to the provost in the Office of Associate Provost for Institutional Research and Assessment at the Medical University of South Carolina. His office “is now certainly much more sophisticated in terms of accessing data and knowing what’s available.” More sophistication is welcome, Gilbert says, because his office, which is a service support group for the university community, is concerned with doing research on the university’s internal operations and uses NCES databases in making comparisons with selected peer institutions and in establishing benchmarks, parameters, and priorities. The enhanced access to data also assists work with external organizations, such as in fulfilling the Commission of Higher Education of South Carolina’s request to generate variables based on peer institutions because the State is under a performance funding system.

The publications distributed by NCES within different organizational units in the university often get “lost,” Gilbert says. To help others expand their horizons, to make sure the publications and data are widely avail-

able, his office is in the initial stages of setting up a NCES library as a resource for the departments and colleges of the Medical University, such as the departments of epidemiology and biostatistics, and for university researchers, such as those who are doing community health education projects. Gilbert says the library will be a resource and provide easy access to the publications and data for other higher education colleagues and institutions in the general region, including the College of Charleston, Charleston Southern University, and technical colleges.

Gilbert is also expanding horizons for NCES publications, making people cognizant of the data in other ways. One is through the biweekly meetings of the university’s Committee on Institutional Assessment. Another is by scanning the university’s publication that lists research projects/proposals to see if any could use NCES materials. Yet another is planning to develop a research newsletter (hopefully within 6 months) that will keep the university community informed concerning recent acquisitions and data availability. Still another is exploring setting up a home page—and educating people to use it.

In addition, Gilbert is reaching out to local government agencies that have a need for NCES data and publications, but may not know they are available. The police department, for example, was excited to hear about all the available data on school violence and behavior problems in schools, and the chief told Gilbert they could use all they could get. Leaders of parenting groups as well as youth groups (such as boys clubs)

and of youth sports may also find the data useful.

“You can’t use any NCES data unless you know it exists,” Gilbert notes. The Fellows Program oriented him to the database, its quality, and its broad coverage. As a result he feels an obligation “to make everybody aware of the data” and help them, too, expand their horizons for applications of NCES data.

□

Web Resources

continued from page 1

<nces.ed.gov/forum>

If you are interested in what States are doing to improve data collection and reporting through the National Cooperative Education Statistics System, check out this website. You will find discussion lists about topics such as technology in the schools, a full listing of Cooperative System publications, and descriptions of projects (ranging from data conferences to automation planning) that States have carried out with Cooperative System support. The website also lists the State and local education liaisons to the Forum, including contacts for more information or referrals to the Fellows Program.

<www.fedstats.gov>

For additional statistics, go to this website, which gives a full range of statistical information from a number of Federal agencies.

□

An Interview with R.I. Mutope A-Alkebu-Lan

continued from page 1

which grants master's and doctoral degrees and is interested in information on recent college graduates, now knows about NCES surveys of earned doctorate awards and PEQIS (postsecondary quick information).

The charter school movement is new but moving ahead rapidly in the Detroit area, for both elementary and secondary education. Many of these charter schools were formerly independent educational institutions that had funding problems, are now in the public education system, but can still run their own styles of education. In Detroit, chartered schools are accredited by universities, such as Wayne State and Central Michigan, as well as public school districts. A-Alkebu-Lan, serving as a consultant for five of these schools, now tells them about the NCES information available to help their efforts, particularly the early childhood longitudinal studies and the dropout rate annual studies. Because the charter schools are concerned with attracting students to their individual school market niches, he makes sure that they are aware of how the NCES Common Core Data, the school and staff surveys and household surveys, can help focus their activities. In addition, A-Alkebu-Lan says, the charter schools need these kinds of data in order to write successful grant proposals.

Whether you are entrepreneurial and into consulting, or involved in libraries, in schools, in colleges and universities, or in research, A-Alkebu-Lan says, you can use NCES materials! □

News from the Field

An Interview with NCES Fellow Robin Taylor

ROBIN TAYLOR, education associate for data coordination and data management in the Delaware Department of Education, is involved in "two big things," both directly related to NCES data collections and publications. One is developing school and district profiles. The school profiles, which are done each year for every school in Delaware, are 8-page report cards that include data on instruction, staff, students, and programs as well as finances and discipline. They are an important tool in Delaware's 4-year-old school choice program: parents receive them in late fall and use them in making choices by late winter for the following school year. The district profiles are created by aggregating the data from the school profiles.

Taylor's other big thing is developing and implementing the statewide pupil accounting system. For both the accounting system and the profiles, she says, "standards for definition are critical." Now, as a result of the spring 1998 NCES Fellows Program, Taylor says she is "on the same page" as her two data-collecting colleagues who are also NCES Fellows. By relying on the NCES Common Core of Data (CCD) and NCES handbooks, she and her colleagues are ensured of having a

standardized data collection process and comparability of data across schools, districts, and pupils.

To help get teachers and administrators throughout the State on that same page, Taylor has incorporated what she learned as a Fellow into the training and technical assistance she provides. "I have to teach what the data mean," she says, "and the NCES handbooks are what make the data mean what they mean." She is also now able to share information about the great variety of useful NCES publications with teachers and administrators throughout the State.

Delaware is just starting on a new accountability project focusing on student achievement. The project involves individual students, school staff, and districts. They are also looking at the influence of other groups on student achievement. Among the challenges for Taylor and her colleagues is the question of determining how best to measure student progress against Delaware's rigorous student academic standards. The data have to be comparable across schools and years to illustrate accountability. For the work on student achievement, Taylor says, NCES is again providing the background through the studies from other States it makes available and its data handbooks.

Another challenge for Taylor and her colleagues is the need to collect data in just one operation that can be the basis not only for student achievement but also for the school and district profiles and the pupil accounting system. In addition, these data have to be the basis for Federal reporting as well as for providing information

continued on page 4

Upcoming Events

Winter Forum on Education Statistics – *working meeting of the Forum* – January 26-27, 1999, Washington, DC

Annual MIS Conference – *sessions and demonstrations on data collection, reporting, and related topics in elementary/secondary education, co-sponsored with the Mississippi Department of Education* – March 1-3, 1999, Biloxi, MS

Summer Fellows Program – May (no date yet), 1999, Washington, DC

NCES July Data Conference – *presentations, workshops, demonstrations on education statistics* – July 28-30, 1999, Mayflower Hotel, Washington, DC

An Interview with Robin Taylor

continued from page 3

to other State and Federal agencies (which need, for example, information on school attendance because children of a parent receiving assistance are required to be in school a certain number of days). Here, too, Taylor says, the common theme is ensuring a standardized data collection process through NCES definitions.

Because of what is going on in Delaware, Taylor and her colleagues have been exchanging information with Rhode Island about their similar projects. Now, through the Fellows Program, she has also learned

about other, comparable projects in Louisiana, North Carolina, and Texas. The Fellows Program has made her aware of the vast amount of resources available through NCES; and, she says, through those resources NCES also gives her ideas on best ways to meet challenges and needs.

□

Office of Educational Research
and Improvement
National Center for Education Statistics
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20208-5641

